

An Observation Study of English Lessons in Primary and Secondary Schools in Bangladesh



One of the series of baseline studies undertaken for English in Action in 2008-2009

Why this study was undertaken?

- English in Action (EiA) aims to develop language learning and teaching over a 9-year period. It is funded by the UK Government's Department for International Development (DfID).
- The goal of EiA is to "contribute to the economic growth of Bangladesh by providing English language as a tool for better access to the world economy". The purpose of the project is to "increase significantly the number of people able to communicate in English, to levels that enable them to participate fully in economic and social activities and opportunities".
- The EIA project aims to achieve its goal and purpose by introducing innovative pedagogical practices in English language teaching and learning in Bangladesh.
- However, little is known about the existing practices of English language teaching in Bangladesh. Hence, this baseline study was undertaken in February 2009 to examine the current classroom practices in English lessons.
- The results provide benchmarks against which the impacts of the EiA project can be evaluated throughout the project.



How and where this study was carried out?

Data for this study were collected using a structured classroom observation schedule developed by the Open University, UK based upon one previously used by the TQI-SEP project in Bangladesh. A total of 252 classroom observations were undertaken during English lessons in both primary and secondary schools located in Dhaka and central Bangladesh and in Sylhet. Observers recorded what type of activity the teachers and students were doing at a particular points in time from the start to the end of a lesson. The data were collected by Teacher Development Coordinators (TDCs) from the EiA Base Office in Dhaka.

The data were processed and analysed by Sirius Marketing & Social Research Limited in Bangladesh, with guidance from the Open University, UK.

Key Findings: School Settings

“Although classrooms were clean and tidy, resources are often scarce and there is little evidence of students’ work on display”

- Classrooms were generally clean and tidy, had good natural light and basic teaching equipment such as a blackboard and chalk.
- Most classrooms had sufficient furniture for the students.
- In most classrooms, learning and teaching materials were not visible.
- Around 60-75% of the students had a textbook, an exercise book and something to write with. Use of unofficial guidebook was rare.



Key Findings: Teachers' Practices

"Some good pedagogical norms were prevalent"

- Most teachers were found to greet students and write the lesson topic on the blackboard.
- Around 50% of the teachers assigned homework and/or recapped their lessons. More than 40% of the teachers provided feedback on student performances and over 30% assessed students' understanding by asking summary questions.

"Teaching, in most cases, was instructive or top-down and there was little use of interactive methods"

- In most schools, throughout the lessons teaching from the blackboard or front of the class was the predominant pedagogic approach. As lessons progressed, teachers tended to read from the textbook, ask closed questions or move around the classroom to monitor and facilitate students as they worked individually.
- Except the textbook, the use of teaching aids was infrequent.
- Frequently, teachers gave instructions for students' activities or listened to students as they read aloud from their textbooks. Teachers barely explained something in English.
- Most teachers interacted positively with their students, maintained good discipline, and focused on students throughout the class.

"Little speaking in English in the classroom"

- There were few occasions when individual students or groups were encouraged to speak in English.
- In 67% of the lessons, the teachers spoke in English less than in Bangla. Only 27% teachers spoke in English more than in Bangla.

"Pedagogy was traditional and grammar-focused"

- Very few teachers (14%) were found to use lesson plans.
- In most schools, the teachers were using very traditional book-oriented process of teaching. They taught grammar and translation following the book without explaining the definitions properly.

Figure 1: The Start of the Lesson – What the Teacher Does

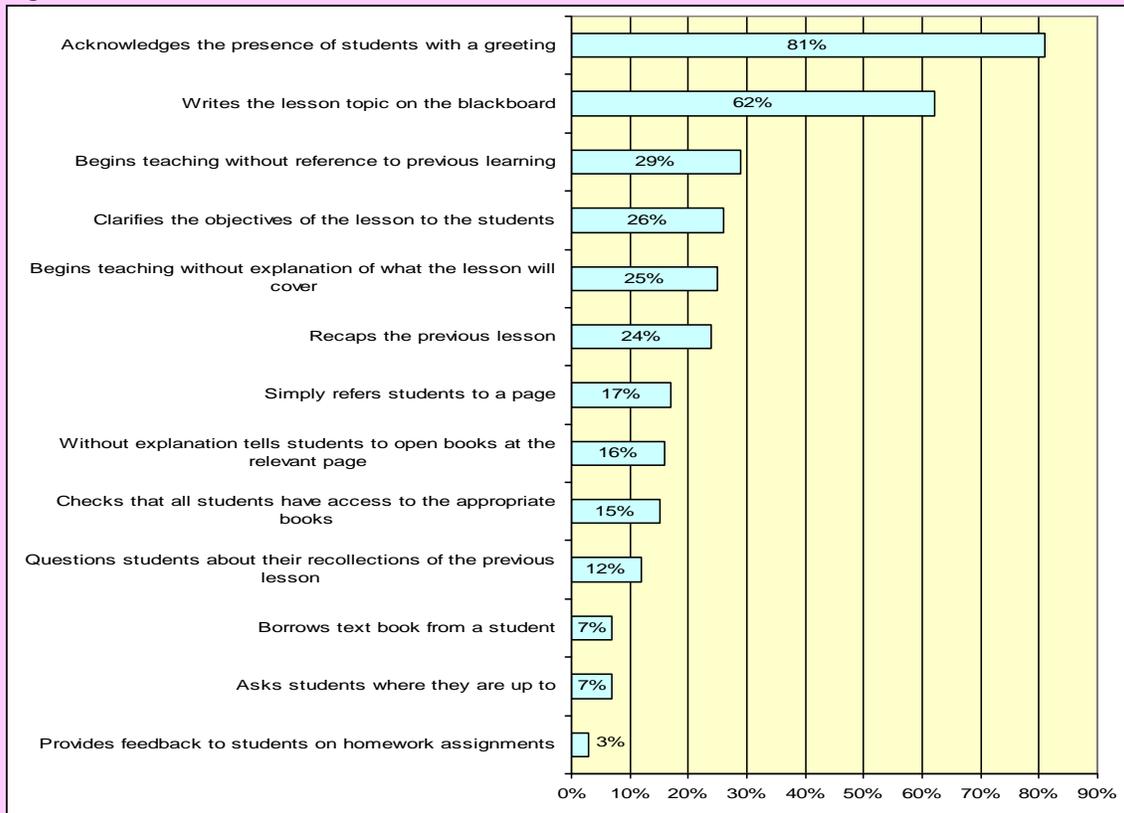
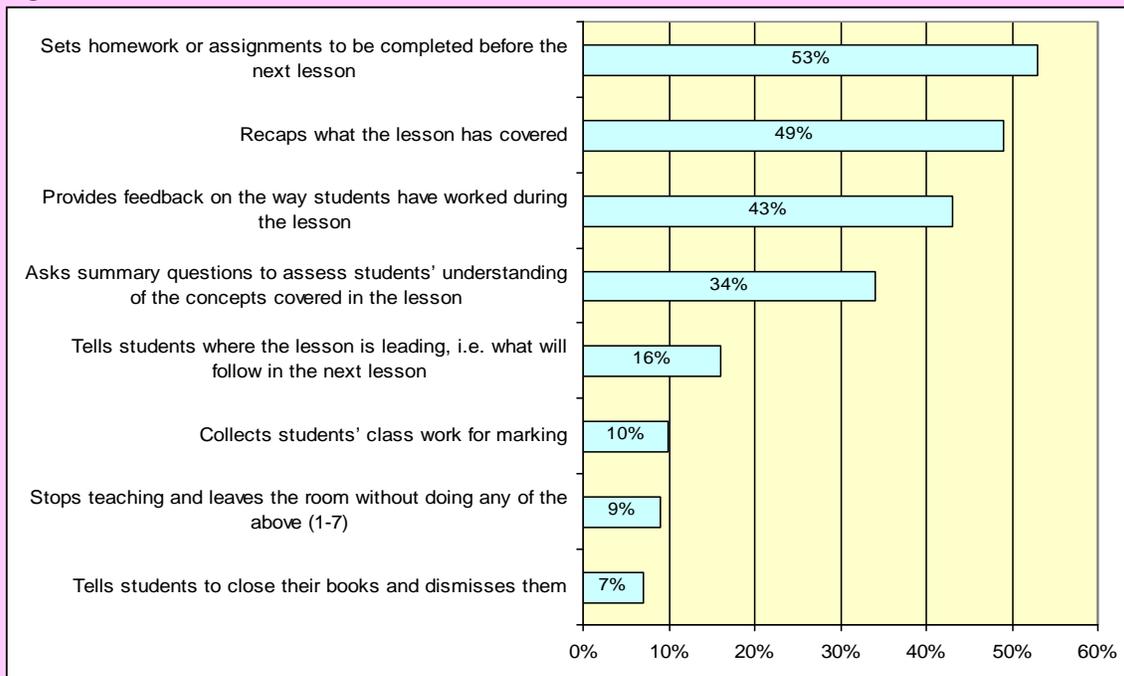


Figure 2: At the End of the Lesson – What the Teacher Does



Key Findings: Students' Practices

"Most students were amazing with lots of potential"

- Generally, the students were well behaved in class. Very few students were found to have problems concentrating on their lessons and/or displaying inappropriate behaviour.
- A small proportion of the students appeared to be confused by the subject matter. Similarly, a few students did not understand what was required of them.
- In majority of the classes, students worked diligently on the tasks set by the teacher, with only a small proportion of them appearing to be off-task and not concentrating for much of the lesson.

"Learning practices were traditional – students were mainly passive learners"

- In almost two-thirds of the classes, less than half of the students had opportunities to participate actively in discussion or to answer questions.
- Only a small proportion of the students spoke in English during a lesson. In 68% of the classes none or hardly any spoke in English, while in 23% of classes only some students had an opportunity to do so.
- In most classes students were not interactive at all; rather they were very passive learners. They were more interested in side talking and other activities. They were only participating by answering the questions asked by the teacher.

Key Conclusions

Despite some evidence of good practice, the pedagogic approaches adopted in most schools observed did not encourage a communicative approach to learning English. The students were, in general, intelligent, disciplined and diligent which should provide great opportunities for the development of communicative English practices.